

The Canterville Ghost

Ch 1 and 2

1. Describe the Canterville ghost's first encounter with the Otis family.

Answer:

Mr. Otis was awakened by the clank of metal chains in the corridor. He calmly took a phial of lubricant and came out. The ghost's eyes were red like burning coal; his long grey hair fell on his shoulders in coils; he wore tattered clothes and his limbs were in chain. Undeterred by the ghost's terrible aspect, he offered him the lubricant to oil his chains. The ghost was quite indignant over the offer. He dashed the bottle violently upon the floor and fled uttering hollow groans and emitting green light.

When the ghost reached the top of the staircase, the twins appeared from behind the door and flung a large pillow on him. The ghost changed his direction and escaped through the paneled passage. He felt much insulted as he had never failed to frighten a human during his brilliant career of three hundred years. He recalled all the great things that he had done in his lifetime and decided to have vengeance.

How does the conversation between Mr. Otis and Lord Canterville about the existence of a ghost expose the contrary approaches of two leading cultures of the time?

Answer:

Mr. Otis and Lord Canterville represent two opposite world views existing in the two leading cultures of the time—those of America and Britain. One appears to be materialistic and rational and the other orthodox and irrational.

Mr. Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, boasts that he comes from a modern and rich country. He exhibits his country's materialistic outlook and claims that Americans would rather like to buy a ghost to showcase it in their museums and use it in their road shows. He accuses the British aristocracy of possessing a view that is contrary to the law of nature.

On the other hand, almost everyone in the British aristocracy and general society including Lord Canterville and his family doctor firmly believe in the existence of a ghost. Lord Canterville consolidates his view by saying that it has haunted the mansion for over three hundred years since 1584, and has always made its appearance before the death of any member of their family. Several members of his family, in addition to the revered rector of the parish, have seen it. Being a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, the rector renders credence to his testimony to the existence of the ghost. Canterville bolsters his claim further by saying that his wife and granddaughter have been disturbed by the ghost.

At the same time, Lord Canterville is rather a punctilious person than a materialist.

How do the reactions of different people on the blood stain in the library highlight their characters?

Answer:

When Mrs. Otis caught sight of a dull red stain on the floor of the library, she thought something had been spilt there; but gave a horrid expression when Mrs. Umney informed her that they were blood-stains, and wanted them to be removed. She again showed her nervous state of mind when Mrs. Umney fainted later.

Mrs. Umney, appeared to be a representative of the conservative outlook of a class in Britain which tried to conserve their belief in the existence of ghost. She believed that the stain was of the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot in 1575 and that the guilty spirit of her murderer, her husband Sir Simon still haunted the Chase. She added that the blood-stain had been much admired by tourists and others, and could not be removed.

Mrs. Umney was probably pretentious of the graveness on the appearance of the stain of blood. She fainted when it was removed, but came to her senses immediately when Mr. Otis asked his wife to charge her for fainting. Then she warned Mr. Otis of some imminent trouble; and finally prayed for them. In this way she ensured an increase of salary.

Washington, the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Otis, on the other hand, was a materialist and rational person like his father. He immediately got set to remove the stain with a much advertised American stain remover and detergent. He even felt triumphant and proud over his success.

Mr. Otis remarked calmly that the weather was monstrous, when it thundered soon after the removal of the blood. He rather made fun of it saying that the old country was too overpopulated to spare enough decent weather for everybody. He cracked another joke on the fainting of Mrs. Umney. He suggested his wife that charging Mrs. Umney for each faint- as it was done in case of breakages in the household - would stop her fainting. Mr. and Mrs. Otis were not afraid of ghosts and they assured Mrs. Umney of the same.

Ch 3 and 4

Draw a character sketch of the ghost.

Answer:

The ghost appears to be quite weak minded and nervous. After having failed in his three attempts to frighten the Otis family, he became completely shattered.

He lacked determination. He gave up his long retained practice of maintaining the blood-stain after a few deterring incidents. He also succumbed to Mr. Otis' will and used his lubricant.

He appears to be quite unintelligent and careless. He was easily tricked and befooled. On his second appearance he easily fell prey to the pranks that the Otis children played on him by placing a fake ghost in the corridor. He even tripped the strings stretched purposely across the corridor for him, and met with a severe fall. He got completely drenched when he made his third appearance and tried to enter the twins' room.

He was coward. He lived in the terror of the twins. When he made his fourth appearance, the twins frightened him just by saying "boo" in his ear. Washington Otis scared him with the big garden-syringe. After this he had to suspend his nocturnal expeditions.

What plans did the ghost make in regard to his third appearance? What was the consequence of its application?

Answer:

The ghost planned to appear wearing a large slouched hat with a red feather, a winding-sheet frilled at the wrists and neck, and wielding a rusty dagger to frighten the Otis family during his third appearance.

First, he would go quietly to Washington Otis's room, gibber with him and stab himself three times in the throat. He was then to proceed to the room of Mr. and Mrs. Otis. He would place his clammy hand on Mrs. Otis's forehead, while he would hiss into the Minister's ear all awful secrets of the charnel-house. Then he would go to Virginia's room and do little frightening things as he did not hold any particular grudge against her. He wanted to teach the twins a lesson by sitting upon their chests, so as to produce the stifling sensation of nightmare. Thereafter he would stand between them in the form of a green, icy-cold corpse and crawl round the room, removing his winding-sheet and baring his white, bleached bones and rolling one eyeball.

However, when he executed the plan he himself got severely scared by the fake ghost in the corridor, which was actually a prank played on him.

How did the different members of the Otis family react when the ghost appeared for the second time?

Answer:

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night when he barged into a large suit of old armour in the hall. It fell on the stone floor. He injured his knees and remained seated in a high-backed chair rubbing them. Hearing the noise, the twins appeared with their pea-shooters and discharged two pellets on him. Mr. Otis also came and covered him with his revolver and commanded him to hold up his hands. The ghost swept through them like a mist giving a wild shriek of rage and extinguishing Washington Otis's candle. The peal of demoniac laughter made Mr. Otis think that he was suffering from indigestion. Therefore, she came out and offered him a bottle of Doctor Dobell's tincture expressing hope that it would give him relief. He did not accept it and tried to escape. Just then the twins came up to him. In a bid to avoid them, the ghost fell on the stairs.

